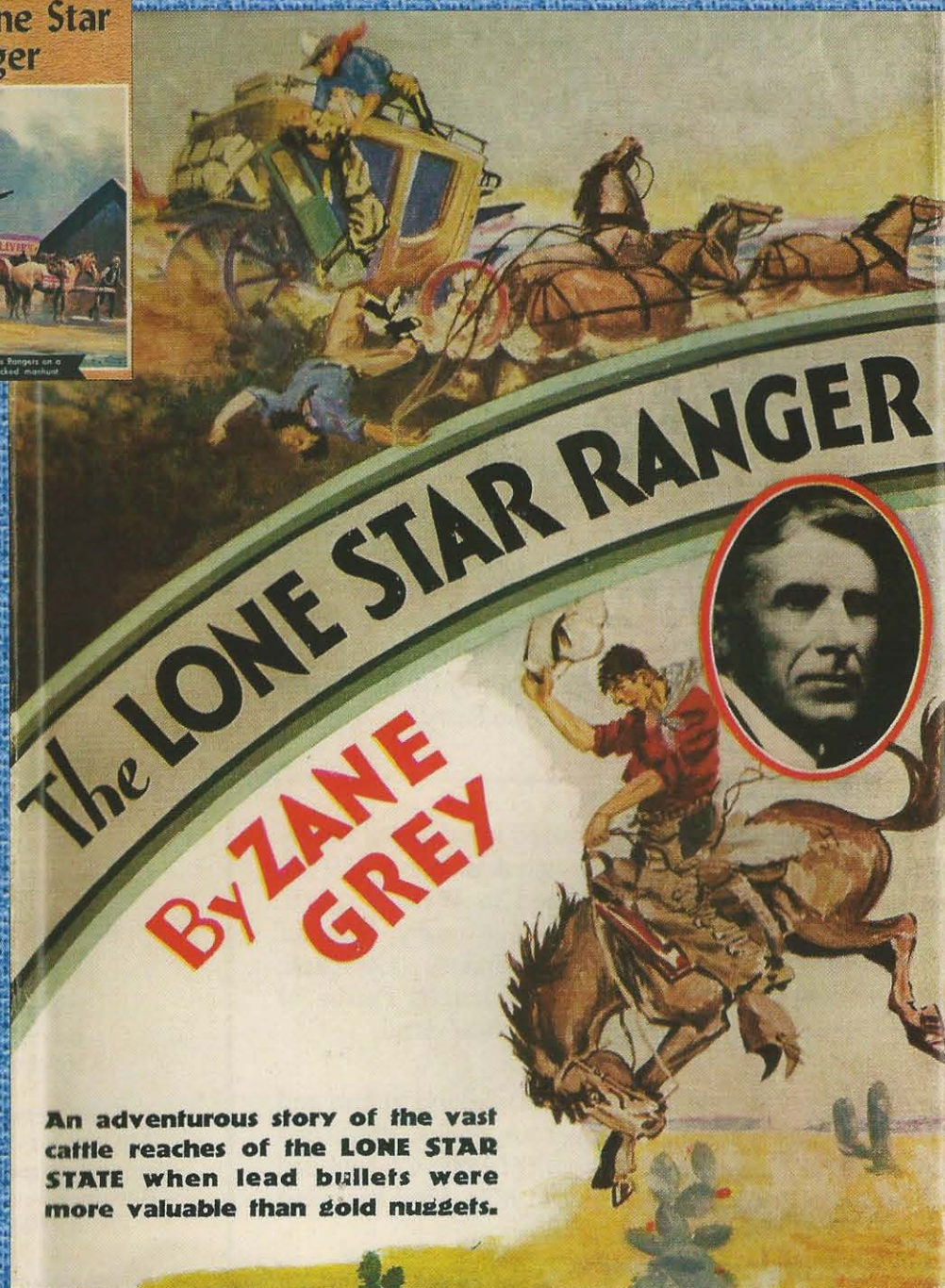
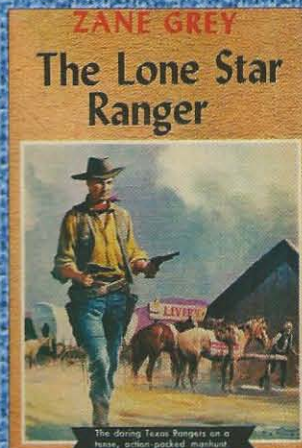


# ZANE GREY REVIEW

THE OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF ZANE GREY'S WEST SOCIETY



## Buck Duane's 100th Anniversary!





## THE GEOGRAPHY OF *THE LONE STAR RANGER*

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This year marks the one hundredth anniversary of the first publication by Harper & Brothers of *The Lone Star Ranger*, featuring one of Zane Grey's best-known gunmen (Buck Duane) and one of his most memorable titles (Figure 1). This book was, however, never written in this format by Grey! It was a shotgun marriage of sorts, cobbled together by Harpers from two other books that Grey did actually write: *Last of the Duanes* (written in 1913 but not published until 1996) and *Rangers of the Lone Star* (written and serialized in 1914 as *The Lone Star Ranger* but not published as a book until 1997).

The twisted publication history of the "Lone Star Trilogy" is nicely summarized by Loren Grey in his forewords to the Five Star Western editions of the latter two books in the 1990s. *The Lone Star Ranger* (1915), is the same as *Last of the Duanes* for the first thirteen chapters (one-half of the book), then the last half is a mishmash of *Last of the Duanes* and *Rangers of the Lone Star*. Blatantly illustrating the awkward conjoining of the books is the fact that at the end of Chapter 9 of *The Lone Star Ranger* a major character, Jennie, is "lost," never to be mentioned again after Chapter 10.

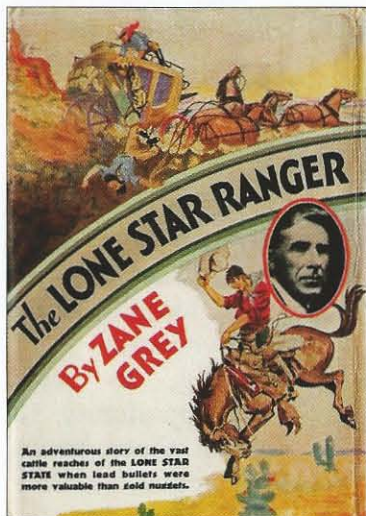


Figure 1: Grosset & Dunlap dustjacket of *The Lone Star Ranger* (from the author's collection).

In *Last of the Duanes*, on the other hand, Jennie continues to be a key figure throughout the rest of the story. Furthermore, even though the second half of *The Lone Star Ranger* borrows extensively from *Rangers of the Lone Star*, the narrator of *Rangers of the Lone Star*, Russ Sittell, is absent in *The Lone Star Ranger*, and the actions of Texas Ranger Vaughn Steele are transferred to Buck Duane.

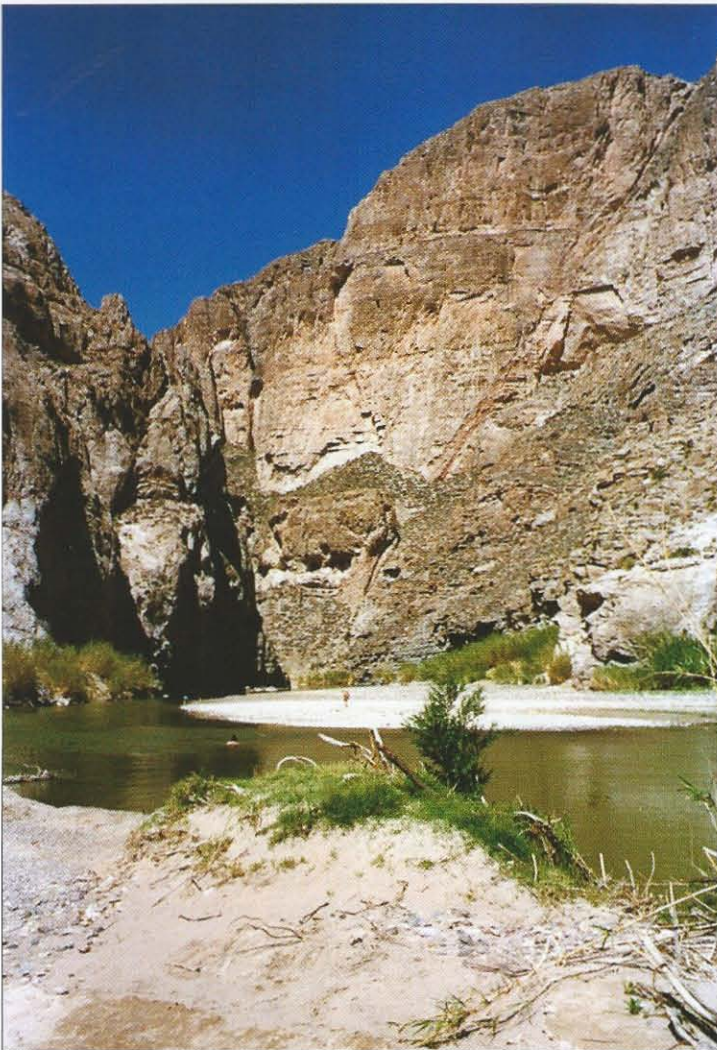
My goal in this article is to explain the geography of the Lone Star Trilogy, and it makes sense to me to start with *Last of the Duanes*. Not only was this the first of the stories to be written, it also has the best-developed geography. This is an important point because even though the general settings of the books are simple enough to deduce (southwestern Texas in the 1870s), Grey complicates the geography of town names. He uses fictional names for some of the major town names in the books, yet for other places he uses the names of actual Texas towns but locates them well outside of their correct geographic context. For example, Bradford and Fairdale are actual Texas town names, but the real towns are located far from their fictional settings in Grey's books. I refer to chapter numbers rather than page numbers because of the multiple publication formats and publishers for the books.

### *Last of the Duanes*

*Last of the Duanes* begins in the fictional town of Wellston, which is probably modeled on Uvalde (eighty-five miles west of San Antonio). Wellston is described in Chapter 1 as being located in an unsettled part of the state; it is a trading center even though it only has fifty buildings, mostly constructed of adobe, and its many saloons are filled with Mexican gamblers. After shooting Cal Bain, Buck Duane goes "on the dodge" in Chapter 2 by riding westward through "a flat region with a poor growth of mesquite and prickly pear cactus." This is the infamous outlaw landscape of the Nueces Strip, the land between the Nueces River and the Rio Grande. Duane seeks to escape to "the great waste of mesquite and rock bordering the Rio Grande." After several days he crosses a stream with a shallow, gravel bottom (probably the Pecos River) and realizes he is in the realm of outlaws, "beyond the pale," in the trans-Pecos West.

By Chapter 4 the setting shifts even farther west into the Big Bend Country, named for the sweeping bend of the Rio Grande from its southeasterly flow to the northeast as it passes through deep canyons lined with rim rock. By climbing thousands of feet down to the river Duane finds an outlaw refuge in Bland's cattle rustling camp. This canyon hideout may be set in one of the major canyons in or near what is now Big Bend National Park, such as Boquillas Canyon in southern Brewster County (Figure 2).





*Figure 2: Boquillas Canyon of the Rio Grande  
in Big Bend National Park  
(photo by the author).*

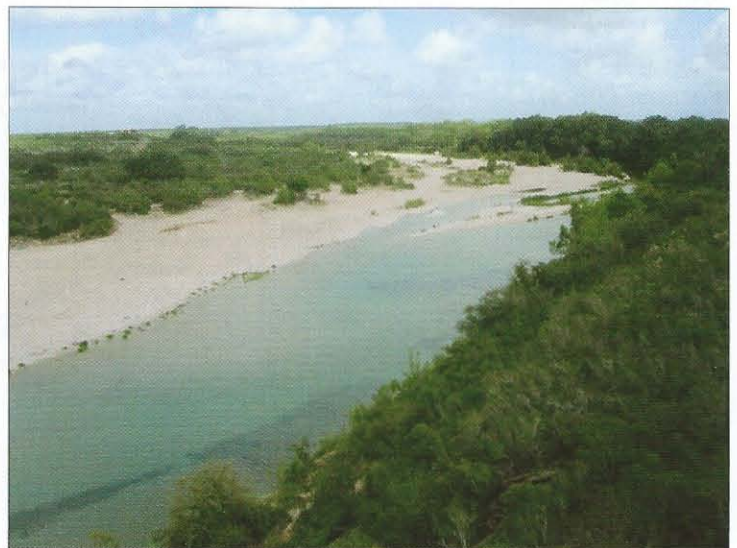
Duane can barely move in the willows without being seen because his feet get tangled in the close-growing multi-branched stems. These tense, thrilling passages in Chapter 12 set in the brakes are, in my opinion, some of the best action in pursuit of a fugitive that Grey ever wrote.

In Chapter 14 Captain MacNelly of the Texas Rangers promises a pardon for Duane and enlists him into the Rangers to clean out Cheseldine's outlaw gang in the Big Bend Country. Duane thus becomes the title character, the "Lone Star Ranger." Captain MacNelly is based upon the real-life Captain Leander McNelly who famously cleared the outlaws from the Nueces Strip. With this temporal clue and the mention of real-life outlaws in Chapters 1, 8, and 22, including King Fisher, John Wesley Hardin, Wild Bill Hickok, Billy the Kid, and Cole Younger, I estimate the temporal setting of the book to be the mid-1870s. After a tearful reunification with Jennie, Duane heads back west across the Nueces Strip to Valentine, a small town (along U.S. 90) just west of the Davis Mountains.

Starting with Chapter 16 the geography becomes much more explicit as Grey uses more actual town and mountain names. Duane sees in Chapter 19 that Cheseldine's hideout is on the south side of Mount Ord, a 6,803-foot igneous peak located eleven miles southeast of the town of Alpine. It is the highpoint of the Del Norte Mountains. Cheseldine controls Brewster, Jeff Davis, and Presidio counties in the Big Bend region, and his gang members are often seen in Valentine, Marfa, and Ord, but he operates mostly in Bradford.

In the outlaw camp Duane meets Jennie, a young woman held against her will. Duane eventually rescues Jennie from Bland's lair in Chapter 9, and they try to escape eastward out of outlaw country by crossing the Nueces, but Duane loses Jennie in the thorny mesquite thickets of the Nueces Strip.

For the next several years Duane rides up and down the Nueces River, hoping to hear a clue as to Jennie's fate, but he is constantly pursued by Rangers or a posse. Along the Nueces he almost meets his end when he is shot in the arm and then cornered in willow brakes (dense tangles of shrubby vegetation). The river is too shallow to swim, and its quicksand bottom precludes wading (Figure 3). Swarms of vicious mosquitoes plague Duane, bloodhounds terrify him as they keep him penned in the brakes, and then there is talk by the men on guard of firing the brake.



*Figure 3: Nueces River south of Uvalde  
(photo from wikimedia.org).*



The town names of Ord and Bradford are fictional, though spatially Bradford is placed about where Marathon is located today. Two other prominent landmarks just west of the Del Norte Mountains in west-central Brewster County are also mentioned: Elephant Mountain (6,225 feet) and Cathedral Mountain (6,886 feet).

Val Verde, where Poggin (Cheseldine's gunslinger) wounds Duane in Chapter 21, is probably based on Del Rio, the county seat of Val Verde County (located along the Rio Grande downstream of Big Bend Country). The book concludes where it began, on the east side of the Nueces Strip in Wellston (Uvalde), as Jennie and Duane watch the sun set over the Nueces River while Jennie dreams of their relocation to a farm in Indiana or Michigan, far from Texas.

### *Rangers of the Lone Star*

Loren Grey's foreword makes it clear that this book is not his favorite of the "Lone Star Trilogy." Dr. Grey bases that opinion on the *Lorna Doone*-like quality (a nineteenth-century English romance) of *Rangers of the Lone Star* and his feeling that *Last of the Duanes* is more "powerful." To the further demerit of *Rangers of the Lone Star*, I can add that it has the least-developed geographic context of any of Grey's Westerns.

Incidentally, Loren Grey inaccurately asserts that *Rangers of the Lone Star* is Grey's only Western written in the first person; he forgets Grey's final work, 1939's telegraph tale *Western Union*.

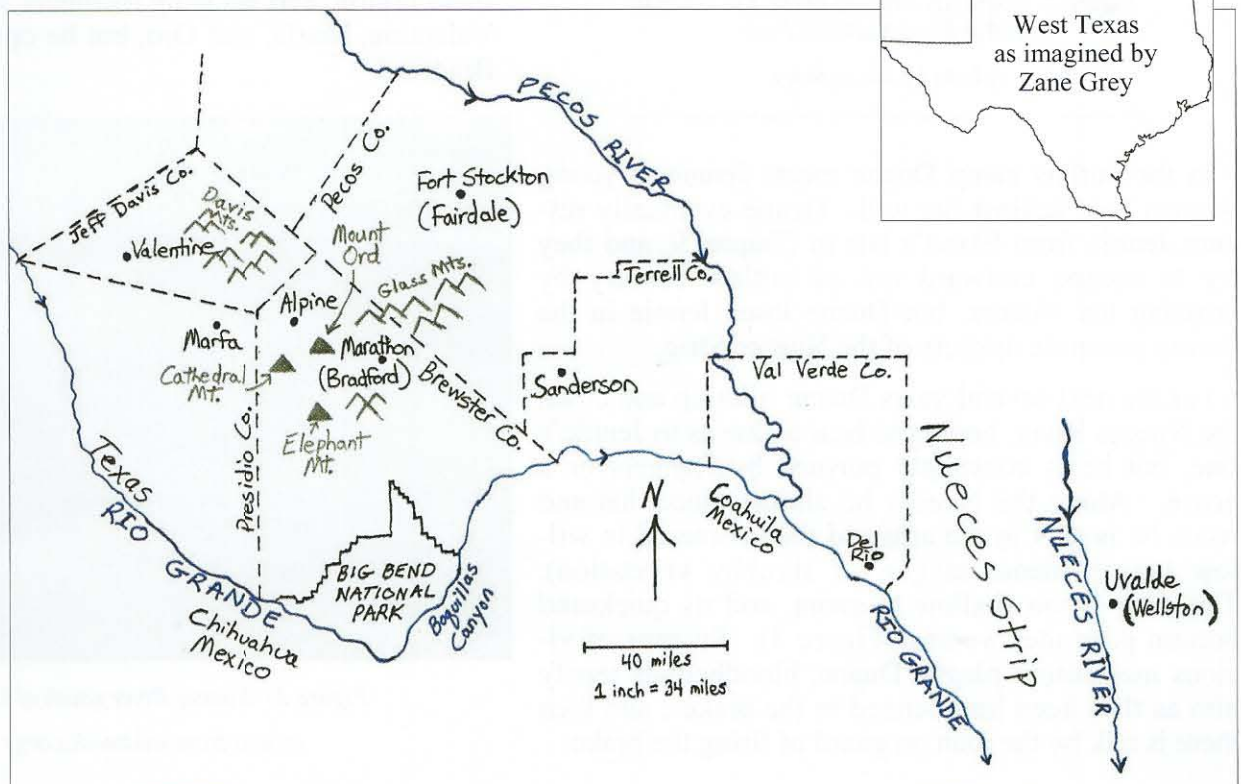
The book begins with Captain MacNeal (the same Texas Ranger Captain McNelly) plotting to rid Texas of the outlaws west of the Colorado River (the one that flows through Austin). He sends Ranger Vaughn Steele and U.S. Deputy Marshal Russ Sittell into the Big Bend Country where the largest cattle rustling gangs have their hideouts. Steele and Sittell travel separately to Fairdale, located in the "great wild barren region" west of the Pecos River.

The spatial setting of the fictional Fairdale, where Longstreth's gang congregates, is northwest of real-life Sanderson, Texas (which is along U.S. 90, just northeast of the Big Bend in southwestern Terrell County). With a population of 2,500, Fairdale is surrounded by great cattle ranges (Chapter 2), is a half-mile wide with red-adobe brick houses set among oaks and cottonwoods (Chapter 5), and has dark, low hills on the horizon (Chapter 6). The fictional little village of Longstreth is set between Fairdale and Sanderson. Temporally, this book is set in the 1870s (Chapters 4 and 5).

Fairdale is perhaps based loosely upon either Marathon or Fort Stockton. Marathon is closer to the Big Bend, but none of the Big Bend Country towns (Marathon, Alpine, or Marfa) existed in the 1870s – all were founded as railroad water stops in the 1880s and were far smaller than the given population of Fairdale.

Figure 4:  
The Big Bend  
Country of West  
Texas, as  
interpreted in  
The Lone Star  
Ranger.

Map created by  
Dr. Kevin Blake.





Fort Stockton, located about sixty miles farther from the Big Bend than Marathon, is northwest of Sanderson and northeast of Marathon. Working in its favor as a possible model for Fairdale is its existence as a county seat town in the 1870s, and Chapter 5 states that Fairdale is northwest of Sanderson. The description in Chapter 1 of Fairdale's location in a "rich, well-watered valley" seems hyperbolic for either Marathon or Fort Stockton, though perhaps it is slightly more fitting for Fort Stockton. (Figure 4 pinpoints these various locales amidst the various rivers, mountains and deserts of the Big Bend Country region).

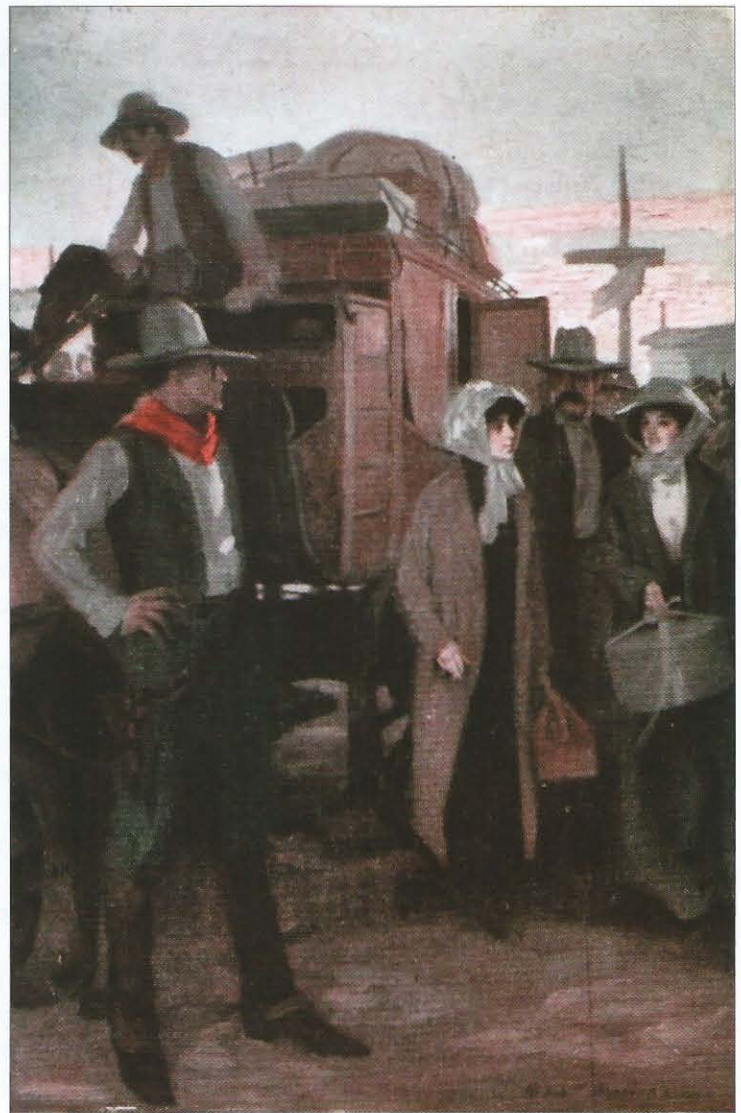
The final two hundred pages of the book feature little in the way of geography until the end, when the protagonists escape the bloody trans-Pecos region and set out for the mossy-oak Louisiana plantation country.

### *The Lone Star Ranger*

As mentioned earlier, the geography of *The Lone Star Ranger* is a meld of the other two books. Temporally, it is also set in the 1870s (Chapters 15 and 16). The first half (Book I: The Outlaw) faithfully follows the first half of *Last of the Duanes* and its Big Bend / Nueces Strip geography. The second half (Book II: The Ranger) also features the Mount Ord and Bradford geography of *Last of the Duanes*, but as in *Rangers of the Lone Star*, Fairdale is featured as the lair of the villain. In another blending of the books, the villain here is Cheseldine, but ultimately that is discovered to be a pseudonym of Colonel Longstreth's. In *The Lone Star Ranger*, Fairdale is a two days' ride northward from Bradford (Chapter 15), and Fairdale is located northwest of Sanderson (Chapter 16).

Duane meets his future love, Ray Longstreth, at the stage stop in Sanderson (Figure 5). As Duane follows the stage northwest toward Fairdale he rides past a "range of low, bleak mountains" to the left of the route. Though not named in the book, these are the Glass Mountains, making an intriguing coincidence with Grey's other title first published in 1915, *The Rainbow Trail*.

The geography of *The Lone Star Ranger* confirms the suppositions made for the other books that Bradford is set approximately where Marathon is in actuality, and Fairdale is set at Fort Stockton. After the final gunfight in Val Verde, Ray Longstreth and Buck Duane are in Wellston. Buck nostalgically views the sunset over the Nueces River while Ray plans their move to a Louisiana plantation.



Frontispiece from "The Lone Star Ranger"

Figure 5: Postcard advertisement featuring a frontispiece illustration from *The Lone Star Ranger* (from the author's collection).

Some of Grey's early Westerns, such as these three, end with the flight of the protagonists out of the region, back to the presumably more civilized Midwest (*Last of the Duanes*) or South (*Rangers of the Lone Star* and *The Lone Star Ranger*). The major characters of these books contribute to the safe settlement of the frontier, but for them the West ultimately is a land of adventure, not a permanent home. This reflects Grey's own travel pattern and lifestyle at that time. As Grey eventually made a permanent move to the West, so did the characters in his later books more routinely choose to call the West home.

